

CLIENT-CENTERED DELIVERY MODEL

Bergen County Legal Services & The Martin Luther King, Jr. Senior Center

Bergen County Legal Services engages in the practice of "out site." The services of our agency (Office Hours/Community Education) are regularly brought to sites where the most vulnerable persons are present. This practice has lead to a true partnership between Bergen County Legal Services (B.C.L.S.) and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Senior Center (MLK), a Center which specifically focuses upon the needs of the minority elderly. Our success can be duplicated in other Legal Services Programs.

*HOW DO YOU START?

The Legal Services provider should learn their community. Where do the most vulnerable people gather? (For Example: Senior Nutrition Sites, Adult Day Care Centers, etc.). In our case, BCLS made contact with the local African American Churches. From this contact, a connection was made to the Varick Memorial A.M.E.Z. Church which houses the MLK Senior Center.

*FOUNDATION BUILDING:

Once a potential site was identified, a BCLS staff member visited and had meetings with the Center's Executive Director. The program was proposed of providing regular monthly office hours (Two Hours Per Visit/Once A Month) as well as providing Community Education on various topics at the Seniors request. An agreed upon monthly schedule was set and the practice began on a trial basis.

*BE PATIENT:

In the beginning, the Program was met with apprehension by the seniors. Who was this stranger in the Center who returned every month? In the early days, the results were relatively poor. Perhaps only one or two seniors per visit. Trust is hard won. Slowly, perceptions changed. The monthly visit from BCLS was accepted as any other MLK, Jr. Center Activity. The Monthly Activities Calendar soon read, "Bingo, Arts & Crafts, Legal Services." The Program was on its way.

*COMMITMENT:

Management must be committed to the "OUT SITE" concept. At the beginning of the monthly visits, numbers will probably not be great. The relationship with the community group will likely take time to develop. The results will be worth the growing pains.

***STAFFING:**

In the beginning, to maintain continuity, it is probably best to have one staff member available for the monthly visits. Once the Program is established, the staff members can rotate so as to avoid burnout. Also, staff members should be advised to bring sufficient paperwork to the site. In this way, if there are not a great number of clients, the staff members can still get their work done and avoid the frustration of wasted time.

***REWARDS:**

The goal of the "OUT SITE" Project is to establish a partnership with a community based organization. This partnership will reap rewards beyond the extension of services to an underserved client community.

In our case, as a result of our long standing relationship with the MLK, Jr. Senior Center, Inc., we have developed an informal exchange program. Each of us now has a representative serving on the other's Board of Directors. In this way, BCLS can develop a deeper insight into the needs of the minority community. At the same time, the minority community has a voice in the policy and priority setting for BCLS. In this exchange, the two agencies share ideas on ways to improve services to the minority elderly and, at the same time, promote diversity in both.

I strongly urge any Legal Services provider with a desire to develop a Client-Centered Delivery Model to consider an "OUT SITE" Project. The rewards will be great.

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